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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 CONAKRY 000757

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SUBJECT: GUINEA STRIKE: DAY ONE IS PEACEFUL, PUBLIC SUPPORT
APPEARS TENTATIVE

REF: CONAKRY 747

¶1. (U) Summary. Guineans are mostly following the strike called for June 8 by the USTG-CNTG union coalition. Most offices, larger stores, businesses and government offices are either closed or barely staffed. As the day continued, some taxi drivers got on the road, and most gas stations opened, along with a few small shops. There are no reports of violence.

¶2. (U) The government responded to union demands with a communique read by new Minister of Territorial Administration Moussa Solano that was broadcast repeatedly. No talks are currently planned between the striking unions and the government, and unions have not responded publicly to the communique. The Embassy EAC will convene Friday to discuss events as we head into the weekend. End summary.

STRIKE BEGINS: PUBLIC SUPPORT STRONG, BUT NOT UNIVERSAL

¶3. (U) Public support for the first day of the strike appears strong, but not universal. In Conakry, certain areas were more active than others, but most businesses remained closed. Government ministries are staffed only at the most senior levels. The open air markets are mainly closed. However, some taxi drivers are on the road, filling their tanks and picking up passengers without protest from strike sympathizers. Fuel delivery trucks are in service, and major operations such as CBG (Compagnie des Bauxites de Guinee) are operating normally. There is some low-level informal economic activity in Conakry, with market women on the streets and small boutiques open.

¶4. (U) To date, there have been no public demonstrations or acts of violence reported. The strike has begun more peacefully than the five-day strike earlier this year, which was marked by tire burning and rock throwing. There is no large police or gendarme presence on the streets, and people who are out are moving freely. The Embassy EAC will meet Friday to assess the security situation heading into the weekend.

NEW GOVERNMENT FINALLY RESPONDS TO THE UNIONS

¶5. (U) The government has finally responded to the unions' demands. In a communique repeatedly broadcast on national radio, new Minister of Territorial Administration and Decentralization Moussa Solano issued a statement designed

to both address the unions concerns and to diminish public support of their effort. Solano is also the official spokesperson for the government, and this was his first official action in that capacity.

¶6. (U) In the statement, the government lists the various steps it is planning to take to raise salaries and pay money owed to retirees. The communique did not address rice or fuel prices, two economic issues driving the strike. The statement acknowledged workers' right to strike, but also recognized the right of workers to work, and highlighted the government's responsibility to ensure the safety of those who choose to do so.

¶7. (SBU) While measured, the statement has done nothing to foster a dialogue with the unions, which met today to consider the government's declaration. The unions have not yet provided any official reaction. No formal meetings between the government and the unions are taking place, and none are planned. Many senior union leaders are in Geneva, attending an international labor conference, including those who left Conakry after signing the strike notice on June 6.

COMMENT

¶8. (SBU) The strike does not appear to have started with the same unanimous support as the five-day strike that ended in March. However, it has been effective and peaceful. There is no guarantee it will follow the same arc as the prior strike, which started strong and began to fizzle as the week wore on. With political parties meeting Friday, June 9, to consider their next steps, it is possible they

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may publicly step in and add a new dimension to the strike this weekend. This strike effort could weaken, if a public figure or figures do not step up to stoke the anger of the populace against the government. On the other hand, the union efforts may gain momentum during the weekend if people do not see any concrete government response. In this scenario, next week may bring a new set of challenges.
McDONALD